

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Easement application for the installation of a buried fiber optic cable to upgrade 3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc.'s current facilities and services in the Dupuyer exchange serving area in and around Dupuyer, MT.

Proposed Implementation Date: Spring/Summer 2014

Proponent: 3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc., PO Box 429, Fairfield, MT 59436

Location: See below list of tracts.

County: Pondera and Teton

Trust: Common Schools (CS)

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc. has requested to install a buried fiber optic cable in order to upgrade their facilities and services in the Dupuyer exchange serving area. The new fiber optic cable will serve the Dupuyer exchange serving area in and around Dupuyer, MT. The proposed easement route is located just off of the edge of the county roads in Pondera and Teton Counties. The fiber optic cable will cross 7 tracts of state land. The fiber optic cable will be buried 42" deep and will be installed using a vibratory plow. The easement will be 20.00' wide through the state owned land.

Township	Range	Section	Fiber Optic Cable Location	Acres Affected	Trust	County
28N	6W	9	SW4SW4, S2SE4	1.8000	CS	Pondera
28N	6W	10	S2S2	2.5086	CS	Pondera
28N	7W	16	E2NW4, N2SW4	2.0687	CS	Pondera
29N	7W	16	N2S2, W2NW4	4.1494	CS	Pondera
28N	7W	17	SE4SW4	0.1170	CS	Pondera
30N	7W	36	S2S2	2.4941	CS	Pondera
27N	8W	16	N2NW4, NW4NE4	2.0241	CS	Teton
TOTALS				15.1619	CS	

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc.-Proponent
DNRC-Surface Owner
Tom and Laura Vanden Bos-Surface Lessee, Lease #6034
4V Ranch Inc.-Surface Lessee, Lease #666
Susan Anderson-Surface Lessee, Lease #664 and #3502
A. B. Guthrie III-Surface Lessee, Lease #7002
Kingsbury Colony-Surface Lessee, Lease #5106
Allen Denzer-Surface Lessee, Lease #2436

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed to complete this project.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Deny 3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc. permission to install the buried fiber optic cable.

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant 3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc. permission to install the buried fiber optic cable.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

Soils at the proposed project site are silty, sandy, and shallow to gravel in texture. The topography is gently rolling and the fiber optic cable will be installed along existing county roads. These soils and slopes are generally suitable for the installation of the buried fiber optic cable. Equipment will cause localized areas of soil compaction and will disturb the soil where the buried fiber optic cable is being placed. Reclamation requirements are to compact and level the plow scar created in the installation of the buried fiber optic cable. Then, seed the impacted area with the existing grass types and seeding rates that are listed in item 7 of this assessment. Cumulative impacts on soil resources are not expected as the use of a vibratory plow will minimize the surface disturbance caused by the construction project.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

There are numerous water rights associated with these tracts; however none of these water rights will be impacted by the proposed easement. Other water quality and/or quantity issues will not be impacted by the proposed action.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

The proposed action will not impact the air quality.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

Vegetation will be minimally impacted as approximately 6.25 miles of buried fiber optic cable will be installed by the utilization of a vibratory plow. The vegetation consists primarily of native species, introduced species, and agricultural land. Noxious and annual weeds within the proposed construction areas are a concern, but this concern will be mitigated as the applicants are responsible for controlling weeds within the construction areas. Cumulative impacts on the vegetative resources are not expected as the proposed construction areas will be reclaimed and reseeded. The reseeding mixture will consist of a grass seed mixture of 35% Western Wheatgrass, 35% Slender Wheatgrass, 15% Bluebunch Wheatgrass, 10% Green Needle grass, and 5% Lewis blue flax. If drilled the rate will be 8#/acre, but if broadcast seeded, the rate will be doubled.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T28N, R6W: There were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T28N, R7W: There were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T29N, R7W: There were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T30N, R7W: There were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T27N, R8W: There were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

The area is not considered critical wildlife habitat. However, these tracts provide habitat for a variety of big game species (mule deer, whitetail deer, and pronghorn antelope), predators (coyote, fox, and badger), upland game birds (sharp tail grouse, Hungarian partridge), other non-game mammals, raptors and various songbirds. The proposal does not include any land use change which would yield changes to the wildlife habitat. The proposed action will not impact wildlife forage, cover, or traveling corridors. Nor will this action change the juxtaposition of wildlife forage, water, or hiding and thermal cover. Wildlife usage is expected to return to "normal" (pre-action usage) following the installation of the buried fiber optic cable. The proposed action will not have long-term negative effects on existing wildlife species and/or wildlife habitat.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area.

Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

The parcels located in T28N, R7W and T27N, R8W are in the NCD grizzly bear recovery zone. Grizzly bears will not be impacted by the project because construction will occur next to an existing road and the fiber optic cable will be buried. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by proposal.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T28N, R6W. There were zero animal species of concern, three potential species of concern, and zero special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Fish-Brook Stickleback, Brassy Minnow, and Burbot. These particular tracts of agricultural and grazing land do not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T28N, R7W. There were two animal species of concern, two potential species of concern, and zero special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Fish-Brook Stickleback, Brassy Minnow, Northern Redbelly Dace and Northern Redbelly X Finescale Dace. These particular tracts of grazing land do not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T29N, R7W. There were zero animal species of concern, one potential species of concern, and zero special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Fish-Brassy Minnow. This particular tract of grazing land does not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T30N, R7W. There were three animal species of concern, one potential species of concern, and zero special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Mammals-Swift Fox and Porcupine. Birds-Piping Plover and American White Pelican. This particular tract of grazing land does not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T27N, R8W. There were eight animal species of concern, two potential species of concern, and zero special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Mammals-Wolverine, Fisher, Fringed Myotis, and Grizzly Bear. Birds-Golden Eagle, Veery, and Clark's Nutcracker. Fish-Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Brook Stickleback, and Brassy Minnow. This particular tract of grazing land does not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

A Class III Cultural Resource Inventory of the project area was performed by Western Cultural, Inc. in July of 2013. No historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources were identified along the proposed construction corridor. The proposed project will consist of placing fiber optic cable just off of existing county roads. No historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources were identified along the proposed construction corridor, so no cultural resources will be impacted by this proposed action.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Installation of the buried fiber optic cable will not affect the aesthetics of the land in any way as it will not be visible. It will lead to no erosion of the soil resources on the tracts as the line is located below the soil surface.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

The demand on environmental resources such as land, water, air, or energy will not be affected by the proposed action. The proposed action will not consume resources that are limited in the area. There are no other projects in the area that will affect the proposed project.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

There are no other projects or plans being considered on the tract listed on this EA.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

The proposed project will not change human safety in the area.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The results of this project will not affect the industrial, commercial, or agricultural activities or production in the area.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

This project will not create any new jobs, as the project will be completed in house by the proponent.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

The proposed action will add to the tax revenue.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

This project is of a small scale and being funded by 3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc. There will be no excessive stress placed of the existing infrastructure of the area.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

The proposed action is in compliance with State and County laws. No other management plans are in effect for the area.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

This proposed project area is next to existing county roads which generally have low recreational value. These tracts are legally accessible and the proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational and wilderness activities on these state tracts.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing

The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments.

No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposal.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed action will not impact the cultural uniqueness or diversity of the area.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

This project will benefit the school trust in terms of the \$50.00 fee generated from each of the seven easement applications for a total of \$50.00. The easement on the Common Schools trust land in Section 16, T27N, R8W-Teton County will affect 2.0241 acres X \$1,000.00 per acre equals \$2,024.10 of revenue generated from the future easement. The easement on the Common Schools trust land in Section 16 and 17, T28N, R7W-Pondera County will affect 2.1857 acres X \$1,000.00 per acre equals \$2,185.70 of revenue generated from the future easement. The easement on the Common Schools trust land on the remaining tracts will affect 2.5086 acres of agricultural land X \$500.00 per acre equals \$1,254.30 and 8.4435 acres of grazing land X \$450.00 per acre equals \$3,799.58 of revenue generated from the future easement. The total acres affected by the easements are 15.1619 acres and the total revenue generated is \$9,263.68 from the future easement. Cumulative impacts are not likely as the area is only used for agricultural and grazing and the buried fiber optic cable will not affect the long-term viability of agriculture and grazing on the tracts.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Tony Nickol	Date: October 15, 2013
	Title: Land Use Specialist, Conrad Unit, Central Land Office	

V. FINDINGS

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant 3 Rivers Telephone Co-Op Inc. permission to install the buried fiber optic cable.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The applicant is applying for an easement across 7 tracts of state land with a buried fiber optic cable. This project will provide area residents with upgraded telecommunications services. Significant impacts are not anticipated as a result of the selected alternative. Disturbed areas will be reclaimed and reseeded in accordance with specifications outlined in this EAc. The surface lessee's have been notified and do not anticipate any damages. Easement values are estimated at \$1000.00 per acre.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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EIS

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More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Erik Eneboe
	Title: Conrad Unit Manager, CLO, DNRC
Signature: 	
Date: October 28 2013	